

The First 20 Strips

Written and drawn by
Mark A. Cooper

Hello!



Welcome to *Paper or Plastic?: The First 20 Strips*, a sampler of the web comic that I've been writing and drawing since December 2008.

I'm definitely someone who has too much time on their hands, and it was on one such occasion that I started drawing *Targetoons*, comic strips based on the goings-on at Target, where I work (or at least I was working there at the time of putting this eBook together!). My co-workers liked what I did, and I had plans to send them off to the company's staff magazine, so they'd get a national audience. The plan, however, fell through, which left me feeling that there wouldn't be much point continuing the strips.

But then a friend, code-named "Pencil" (to protect their identity), suggested that I should redraw the strips minus all the Target references, and then send them to *New Yorker* magazine... Instead of sending them to *New Yorker*, though, I discovered the nice people at ComicGenesis (www.comicgenesis.com), who host web comics for free in exchange for having a little advertising included on the pages. Now *Paper or Plastic?* has an *international* audience: 22 countries at the time of writing, and I'm hoping to add a lot more to the list!

I'm the first to admit that I'm not that great at drawing, but I have a damn good go at it. The surprising thing is that of the readers who've commented, none of them seem to have a problem with my ham-fisted drawing style; they just appreciate the humor. In fact, I've had a couple of friends asking to be in the strips (actually, one of them practically *demand*ed it), and they didn't mind a bit that their digital counterparts look only slightly like them. The one in the top corner of this page is, of course, me - my "DigiMe"... Yes, I'm in the strips, too - but at least I've not made myself the star of the show!

If you like what you see, you can find the ongoing adventures of the Supa\$hoppa gang online, as I mentioned - just go to paperorplastic.comicgenesis.com. New strips appear on Mondays and Wednesdays, with occasional extras. Note that you don't need to type "www" to get there; in fact, to save you all that typing, I've turned the address into a link on this page! Aren't I nice? Elsewhere online, I've also written a [wiki page](#), with extra bits of trivia not included on the ComicGenesis site, and a [Facebook Page](#), in case you feel like becoming a fan...

(Oh, a quick note: the quality of the pictures is a lot better on the ComicGenesis site than in this eBook; I've tried to keep the file size of this thing as low as possible, so please bear that in mind when you're looking at the following pages.)

Incidentally, I decided to create the strips using *American* English, despite being British. The reason? My initial audience (my friends and co-workers at Target) was American, so I tailored it to their version of English. Hopefully, British-English-speakers won't be too offended by this - and one of the comic strips even plays on the variations in English (you'll have to go online to see it, though).

Also, if you'd like to show this sampler to other people, feel free to distribute it by email, or send them to the website you got this from, or just stick it on a flash drive and tie it to a carrier pigeon's leg. I really don't mind how you do it... but if you *do* decide to do it, thank you!

Mark A. Cooper

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Acknowledgements

- Jack Brackitt, who suggested creating this eBook when I complained to him that I didn't know how to attract more readers...
- ComicGenesis, the free web-comic-hosting site which hosts *Paper or Plastic?*
- A *big* thank-you to all the readers I've had so far...

Dedication

Paper or Plastic?: The First 20 Strips is dedicated to “Pencil” and “T-Bone”, who were the first to encourage me in this little enterprise. Without you two, I'd be bored a lot more often!

An apology about “white space”

I wanted to keep the strips in the order in which they appeared on the *Paper or Plastic?* web site. Unfortunately, as a consequence, there are a few pages in this eBook which contain rather a lot of white space, because the strips on those pages are just too large to accommodate additional strips without making the text difficult to read. I *could* have filled the space with comments about the comics, but somehow, it felt wrong to do so.

I apologize if my choice offends your sensibilities. If you really hate it that much, get a refund.

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Characters



Penny Cash - Store Manager

Penny learned the value of a dollar from a very early age. On her tenth birthday, she asked for a "real cash register" - which she promptly used to sell off her dolls and accessories to her friends. She was grounded for a week, but allowed to keep the money.

She was valedictorian in NYU's Class of 1998 when she graduated top of her year from a four-year Retail Management degree. Despite this, she deliberately asked to start on the bottom rung of the ladder at Retailworld to gain real, practical experience. Her ability resulted in her being promoted to Team Leader within two months, Shift Manager four months later, and Assistant Manager by the time she'd been with Retailworld just a year.

Penny's career was nearly derailed after landing a right hook on a co-worker on the sales floor - he'd just asked her who she'd slept with to get the Assistant Manager position. Luckily for her, semi-reclusive owner and founder of Supa\$hoppa, Max Value, was making a secret visit to the store to confirm his head-hunters' reports of her abilities, and he hired her on the spot for her gumption. The Retailworld manager who fired her was himself fired for allowing such a talent to slip away...

Firm but fair, with no time for those who would try to suck up to her, Penny is respected and well-loved by her team at Supa\$hoppa Bethel, and she can kick it with the best after hours. Little wonder she's at the head of the guest list whenever one of the workforce throws a party!

With most of her day taken up with work, it's perhaps unsurprising (though maybe a little sad) that her best friends and confidantes also happen to be co-workers. Those people closest to Penny are none other than Deputy Store Manager Frank Romero and Customer Service Manager Sue Compton. Like the true friends they are, though, they're determined to make sure that Penny has a life and friends *away* from work, too.



Frank Romero - Deputy Store Manager

When Penny Cash joined Supa\$hoppa, she was asked by Max Value if there was anybody she'd like to bring with her from Retailworld to join the team in Bethel. She immediately chose two people: her best friends Frank Romero and Sue Compton.

The farthest Frank had climbed up Retailworld's ladder was Electronics Team Leader, but Penny knew he was capable of much more. So it was understandable that she signed him up as Deputy Store Manager, in spite of his own reservations. Penny's persuasion paid off, though, because Frank blossomed in the position - and his confidence improved as a result.

While Penny can take a joke from pretty much anyone, only Frank and Sue can "get away with murder" - and they have to take just as much from her...

Frank's experiences with customers over the years have made him a little cynical, though he doesn't usually let it show on the sales floor. As far as he's concerned, it's not a case of "the customer is always right" as "the customer is often out for all they can get!"



Sue Compton - Customer Service Manager

Sue is the other half of the two-person team Penny Cash poached from Retailworld when she joined Supa\$hoppa, the other being Frank Romero.

Sue had been transferred in from the Hartford, CT branch of Retailworld as Home Supplies Team Leader only a couple of months before she followed Penny and Frank to Supa\$hoppa. She's still finding her way as Customer Service Manager under Penny's leadership, but as with Frank, Penny is sure she's picked a winner in Sue.

Being the junior member of the three both at Retailworld and Supa\$hoppa, Sue has the added complication, on a personal level, of trying to understand the "jargon" which exists between Penny and Frank. The latter two both worked together for a while in Electronics as Penny worked her way up the chain of command, so Sue is sometimes at a total loss when Penny and Frank are speaking to each other. But she's gaining ground fast, and may yet have a thing or two to teach her bosses...



Jeff O'Donnell - Produce Manager

Jeff is the leader of the crack team dedicated to making sure that Supa\$hoppa customers never face an empty shelf in the all-important Produce section. Thanks to Jeff's expertise and years of maintaining good working relationships with local producers, Supa\$hoppa has helped to increase sales with many food producers in Connecticut. Many of these companies now sell on a national level through Supa\$hoppa, either under their own label or as part of the supermarket's *Value* and *Select* brands.

While new to the Supa\$hoppa chain, Jeff is no stranger to retail. The O'Donnell family have been helping to satisfy American appetites ever since the first Irish immigrants came to the shores of the USA. Jeff's great-grandfather diversified the family's interests to include direct sales back at the turn of the 20th century, and the O'Donnells were the first company to team up with Supa\$hoppa in the early days of the supermarket's inception. Although Jeff now works for the supermarket instead of the family business, his parents are proud that he's helping to ensure that "the rest of Supa\$hoppa's suppliers are as good as us".

Outside work, Jeff is the lead singer and guitarist of the rock group *The Hunter-Gatherers*, which he formed in high school. The band is a very popular part of the Connecticut rock scene, and in 2006, played to 20,000 ardent fans at the Hartford Civic Center, their biggest gig to date.



Mark Cooper - Sales Assistant

Mark, an Englishman, emigrated to the USA from his homeland in 2005 to be reunited with his American wife of four years. They divorced in October 2008. Desperately seeking stable employment in order to find a new place to live, Mark reluctantly took a job at Supa\$hoppa, despite swearing (and cursing) that he'd never work in retail again.

People may be surprised to learn, after seeing his cheerful and exuberant interactions with customers, that Mark is actually painfully shy, socially inept, and very unsure of himself (particularly with his job, in the latter case). It is suspected that working at Supa\$hoppa provides the only form of social life he has. Once people discover that he's a nerd, things make rather more sense.



Price Samurai

No scores to settle.

No ancient deaths to avenge.

Simply a desire to provide great customer service while following an honor code based on timeless Japanese principles.

For some reason, management tolerates this.

Little is known about Price Samurai, other than that he is an *American*, not Japanese, samurai. Only his parents knew his real name, but they both died some time ago.

Rather than following *bushido* - The Way of the Warrior, Price Samurai's honor code is *kanedo* - The Way of the Money. Would-be students of Price Samurai's teachings may seek enlightenment below:

Kanedo - The Way of the Money

It is honorable to make a profit. However, there is no honor in making an excessive profit.

It is not dishonorable to give a refund. Rather, accepting the need for a refund with dignity and serenity is truly honorable.

There are people who will make you want to follow them to the ends of the earth. There are people who will want to make you chop off their head. Sometimes, this is the same person.

Rules are there to be obeyed. No matter how stupid you may think they are.

Courtesy towards customers should be a constant. Treat them well, and they will return.

Courtesy towards your superiors is essential. However, even they must earn your respect.

Personal feelings must be kept separate when deciding whether to give a discount.

There are times when your katana and wakizashi should remain sheathed. Unfortunately, dealing with obnoxious customers is one of those times.

Women really dig the katana.

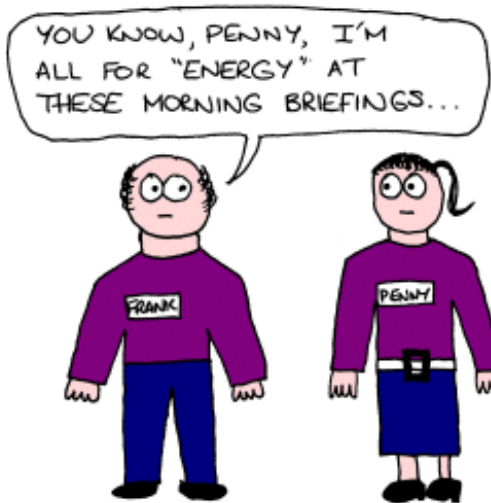
Author's Notes: "katana" = a samurai's long, curved sword. "wakizashi" = a small dagger. And Westerners *have* become samurai in real life: William Adams (English), Jan Joosten van Lodensteijn (Dutch), Eugène Collache (French), and Edward Schnell (Prussian). [Source: Wikipedia]

Max Value - Founder and Owner of Supa\$hoppa

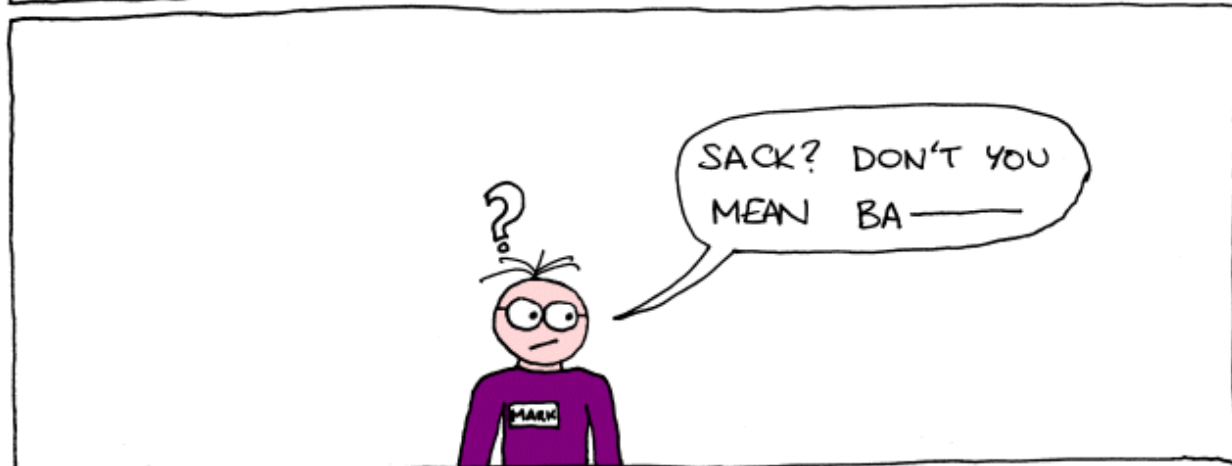
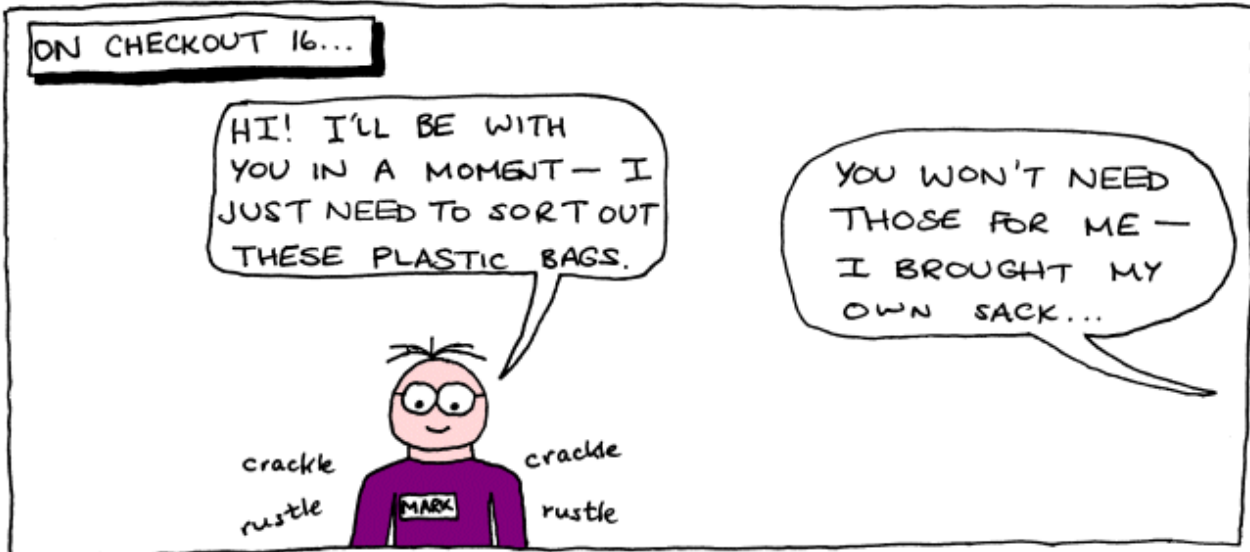


Max left a high-paying executive head-hunting position to risk it all with a bold new approach to running a retail chain: treating the workforce like winners. His strategy paid dividends, and Max is now one of America's richest and most sought-after entrepreneurs. Because of this, Max is now semi-reclusive, but his generosity of spirit still means that he has time for any member of his loyal workforce.

Only three people possess the number of Max's ultra-private cell phone: His wife (to whom he has been faithfully married since 1978), his personal secretary, and Penny Cash; the three of them know each other, and are great friends.



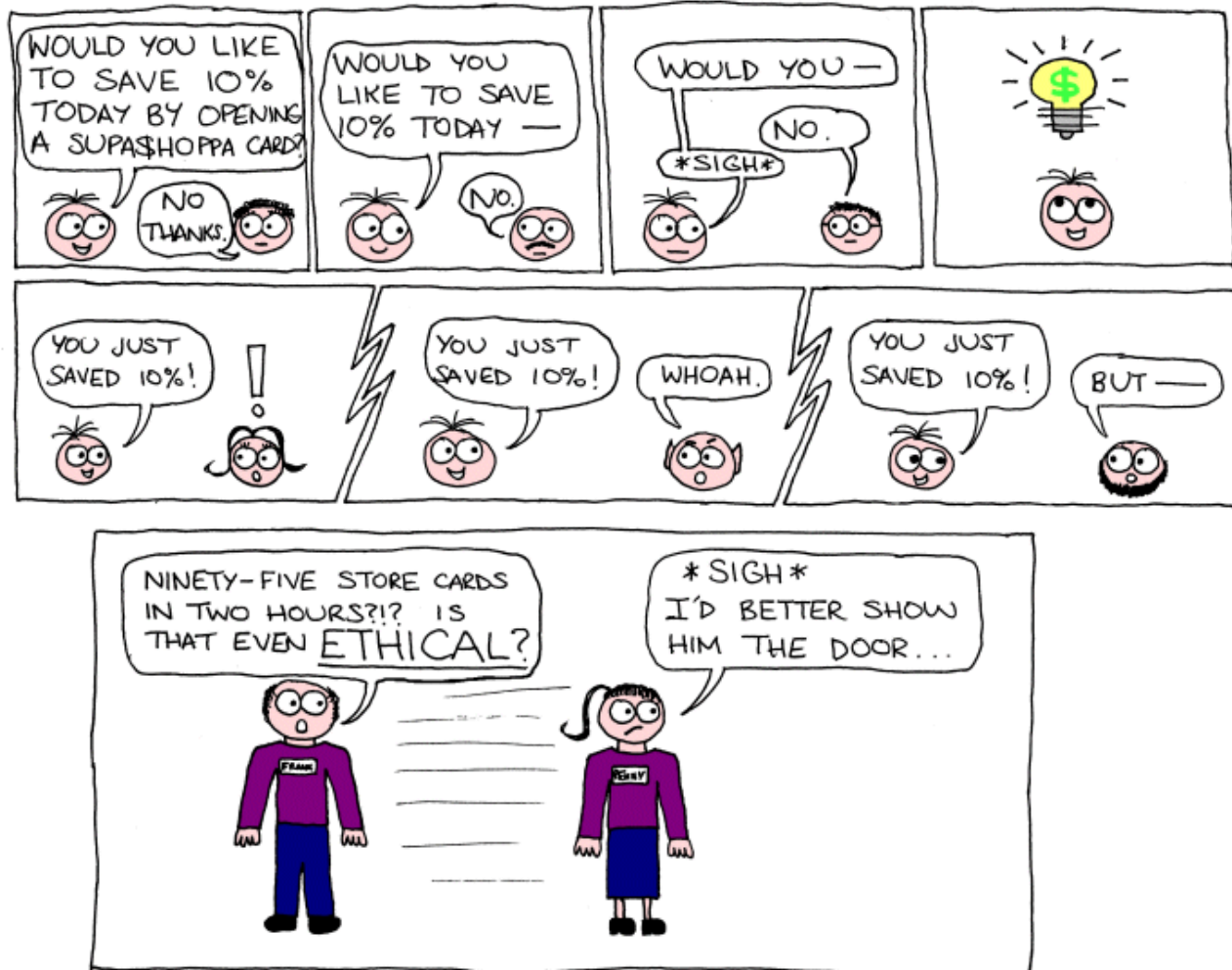
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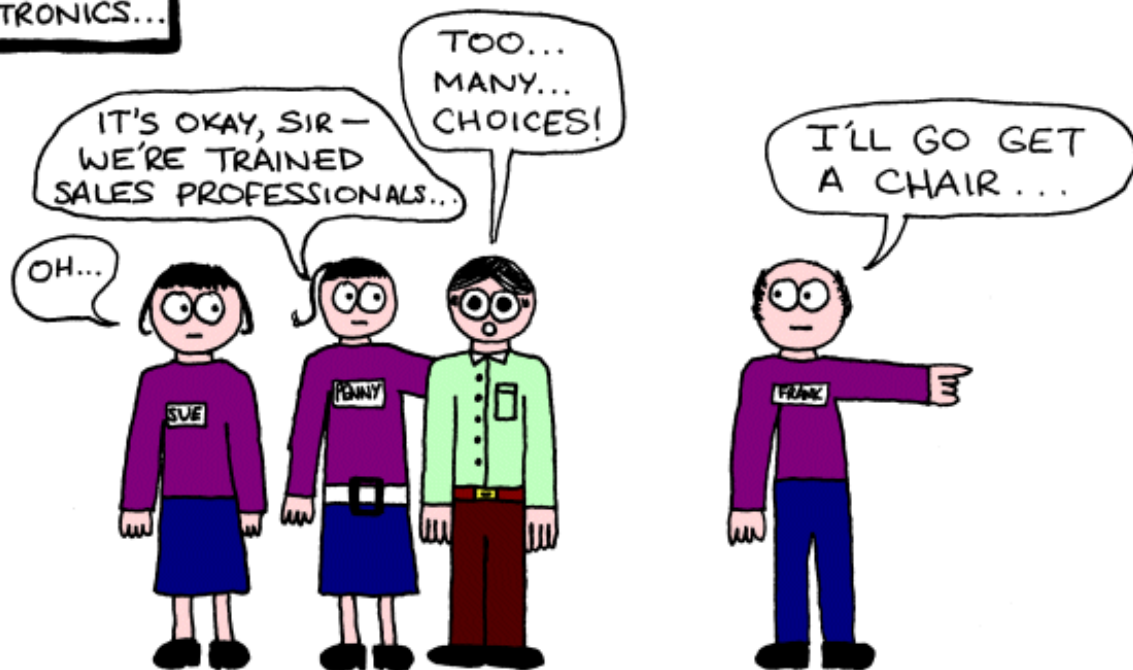
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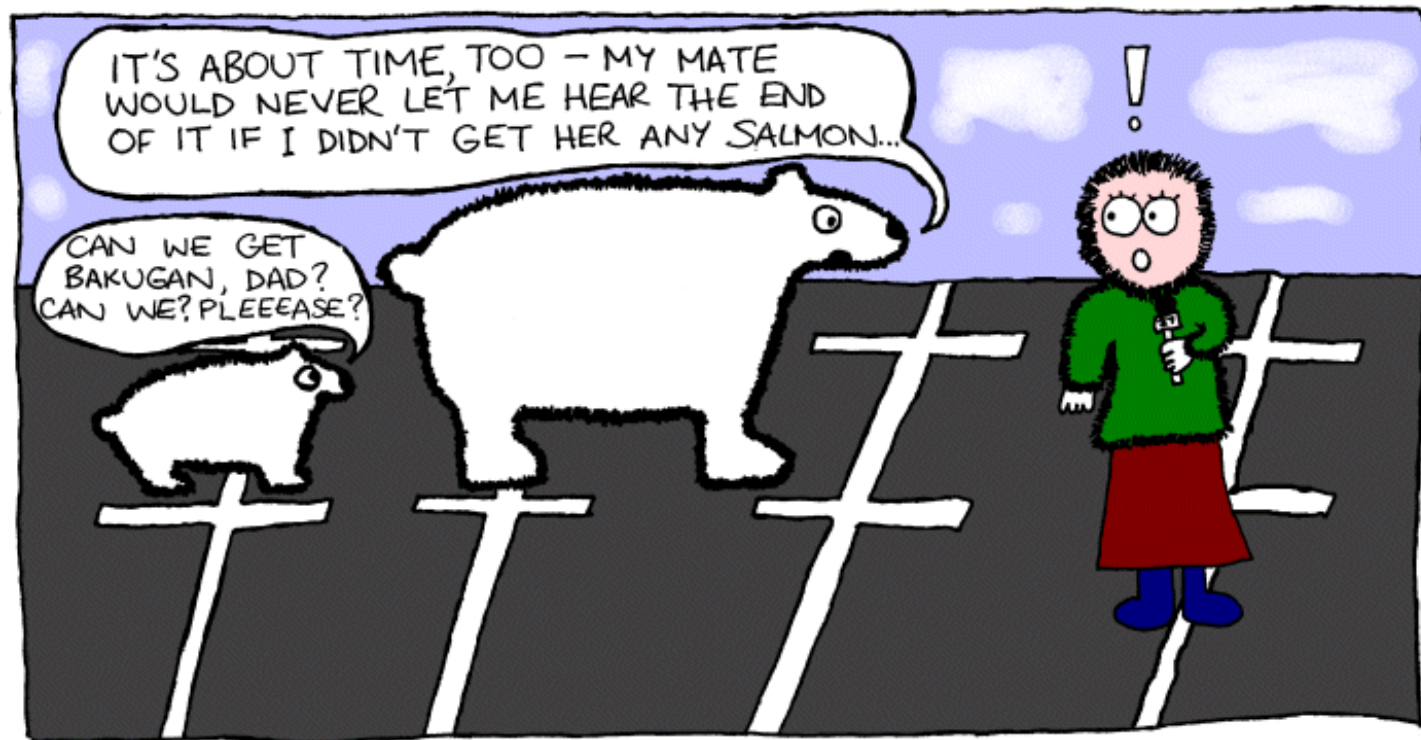
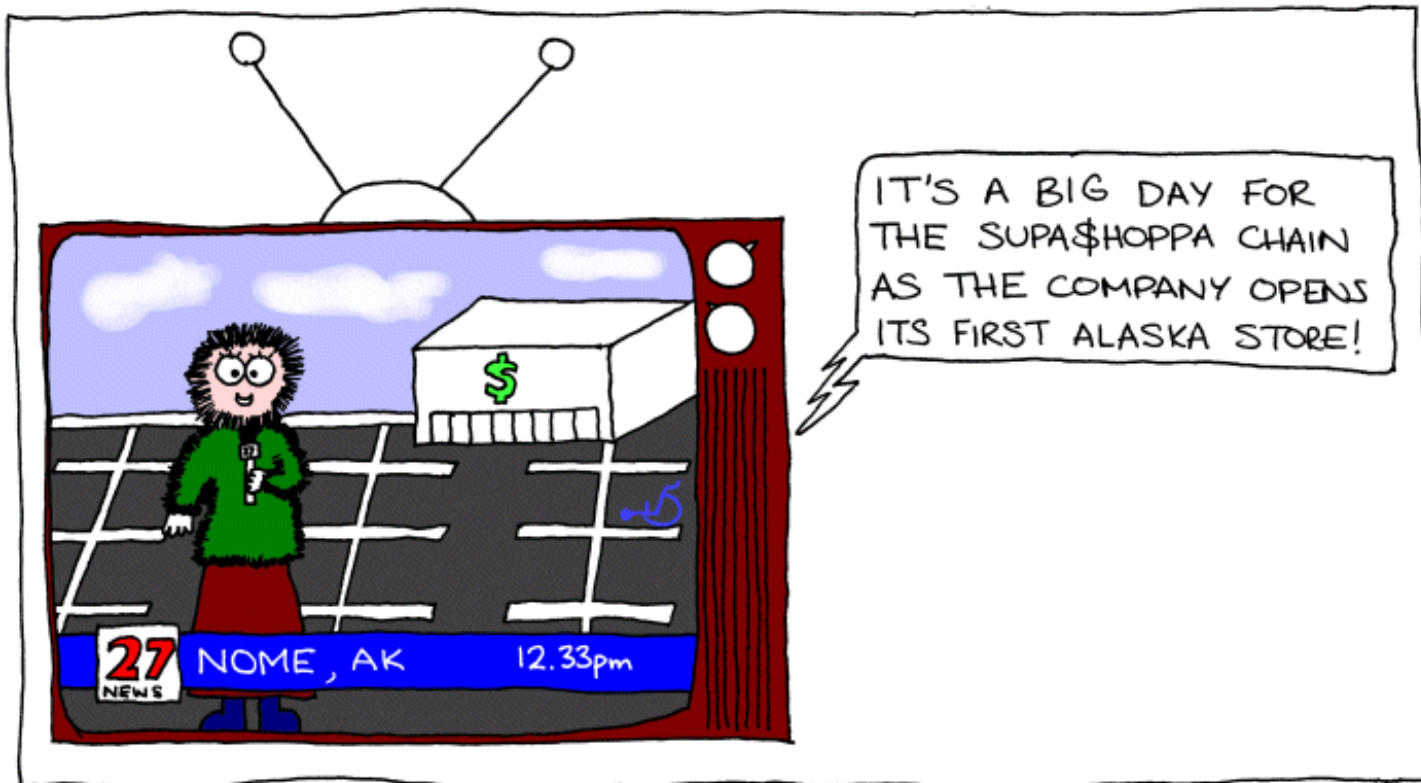


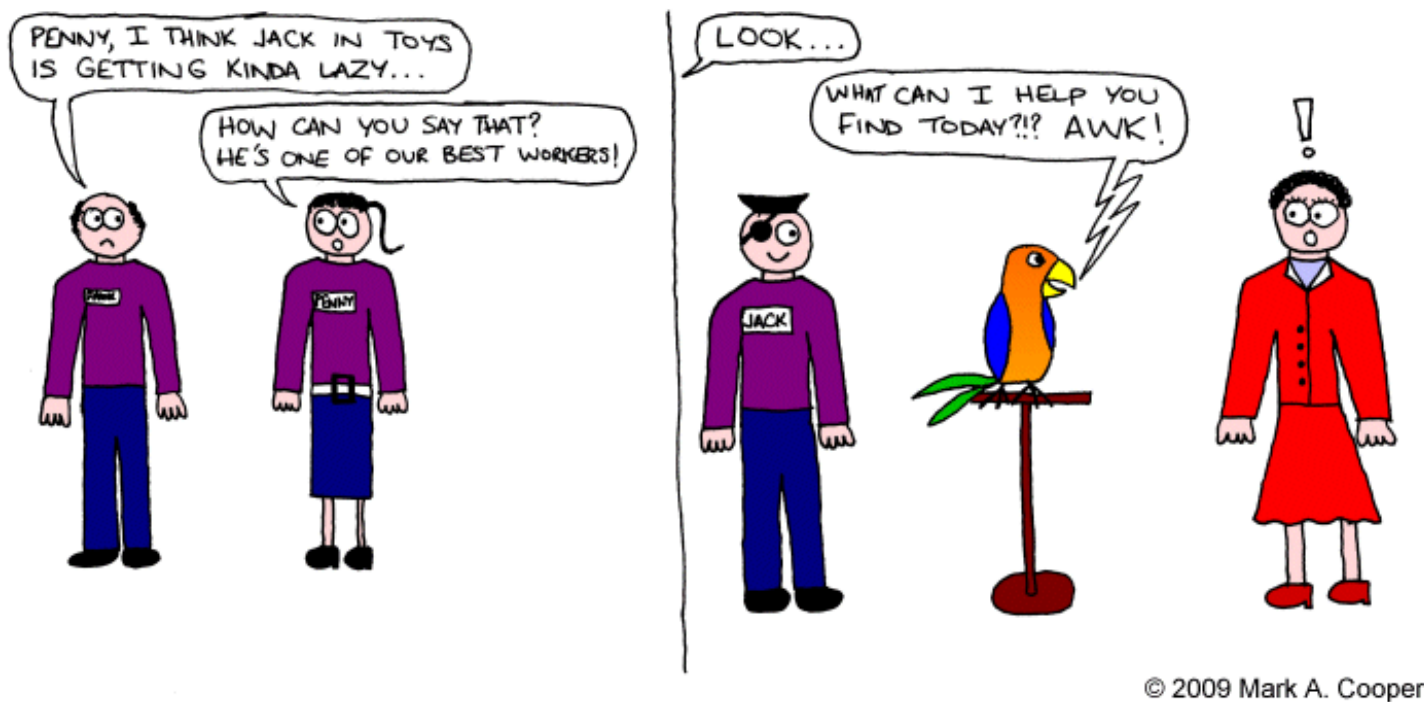
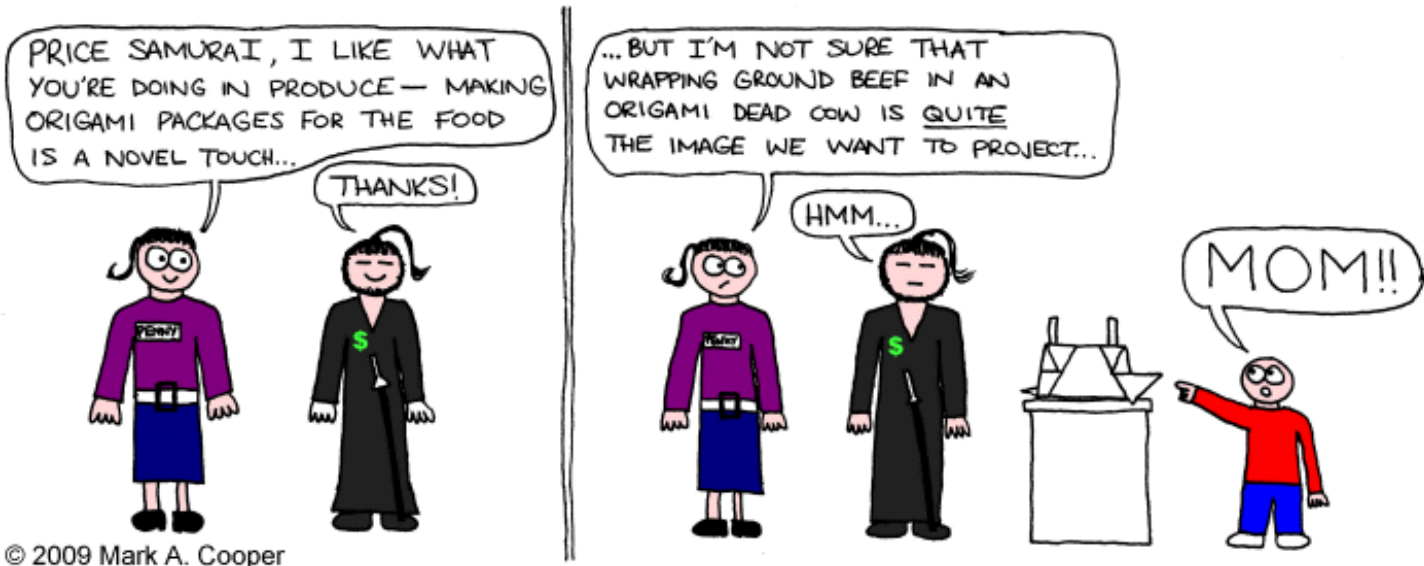
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OVER IN ELECTRONICS...



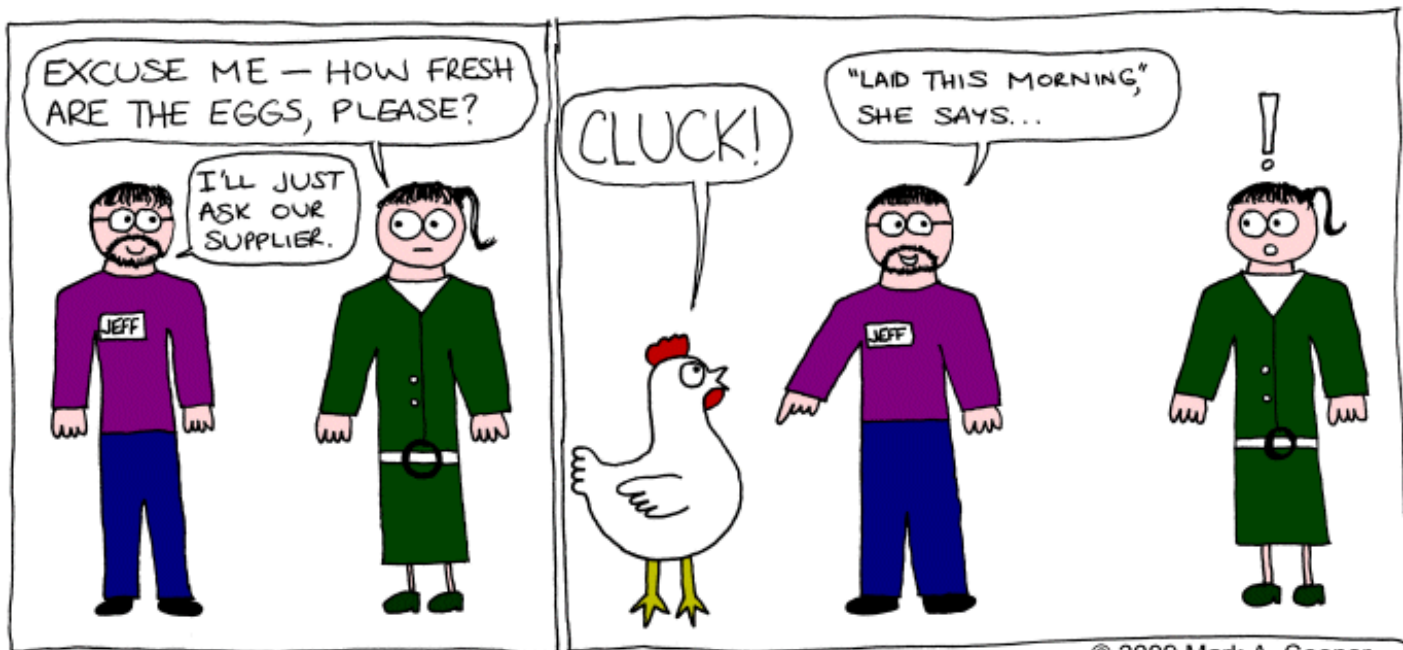




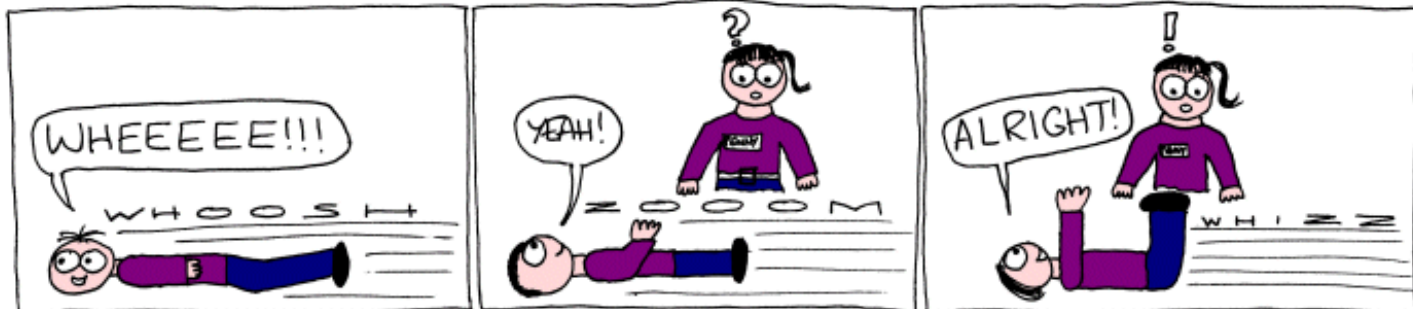


Apologies to George Lucas and Mark Hamill! :)
Star Wars © Lucasfilm
Credit goes to "Pencil" for suggesting the use of Jedi mind tricks... :)

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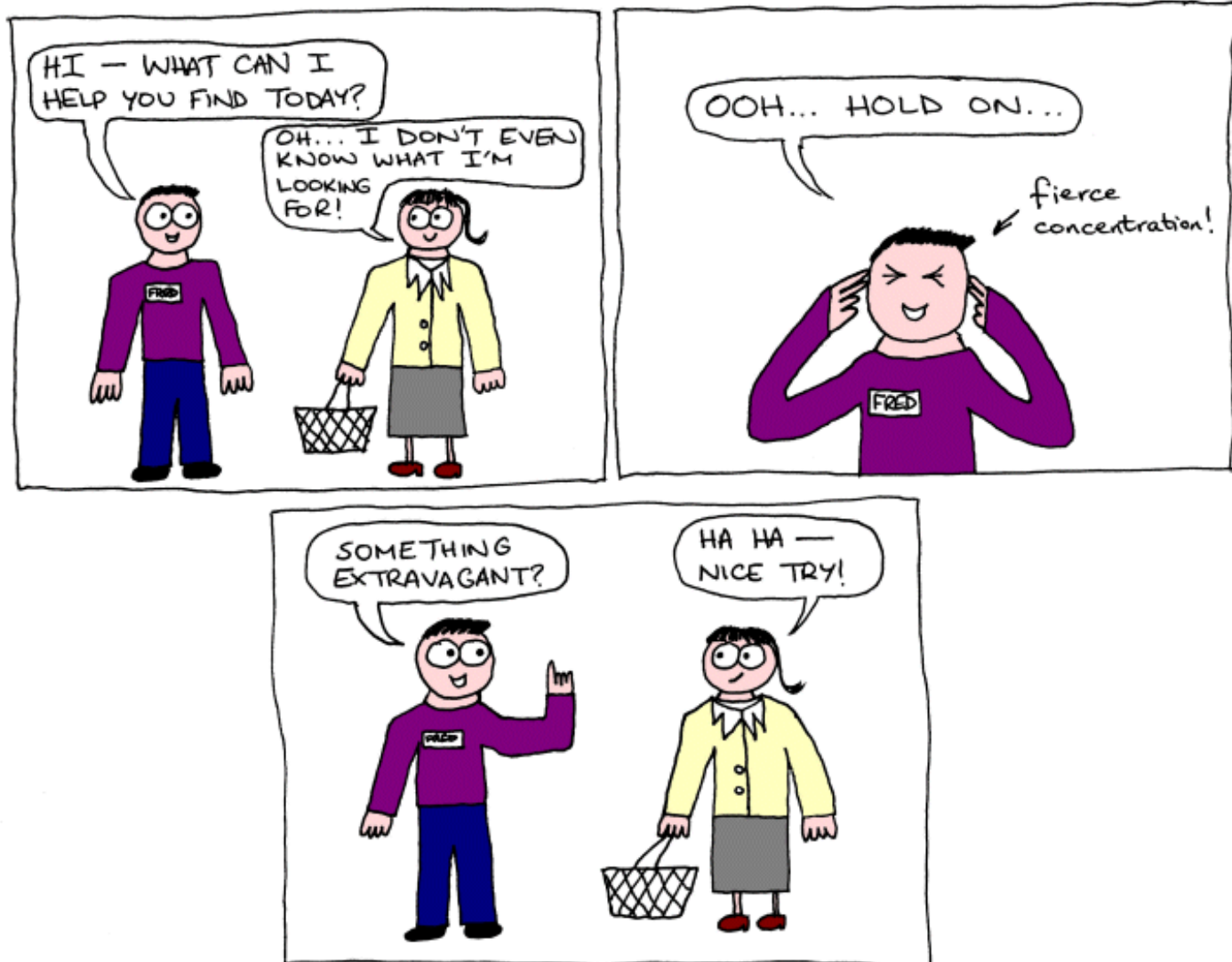


Slip 'n Slide © Wham-O.

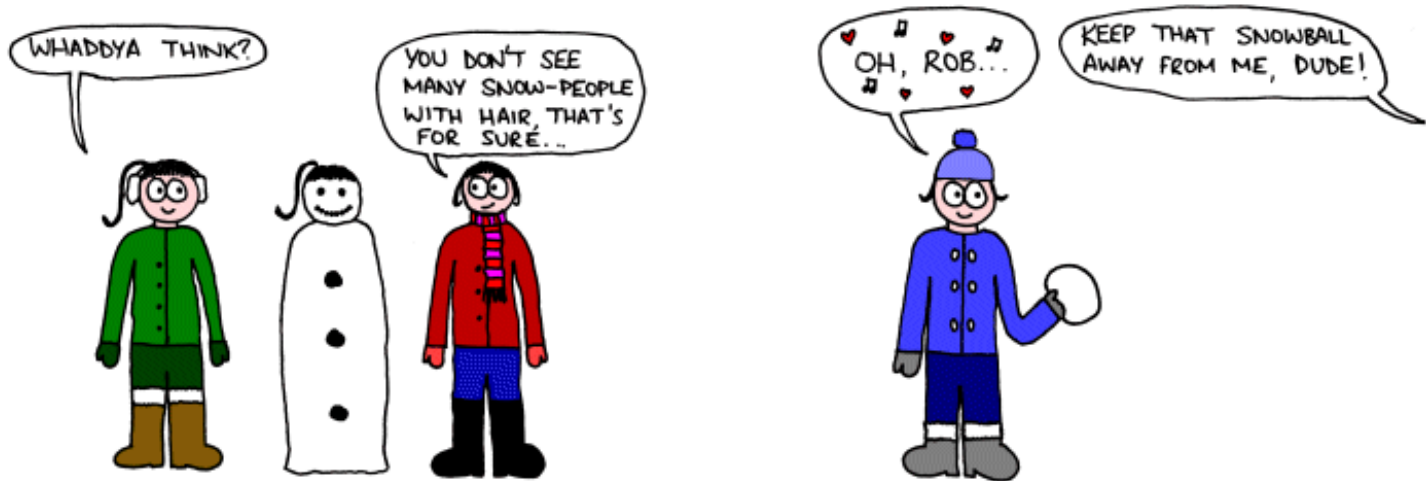
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AH, IF ONLY... ☹️



YOU HOOKED UP A GUITAR HERO CONTROLLER TO THE REGISTER?

YEAH! I'M THINKING OF PUTTING DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION ON REGISTER 3...



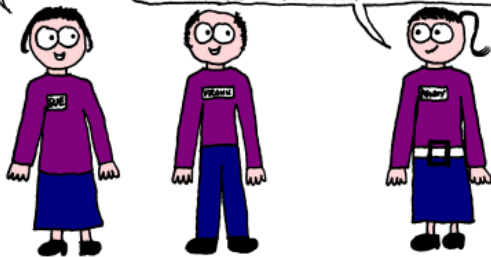
JUST MY LUCK... FIRST TIME I HAVE TO SEARCH SOMEONE, AND HE'S A MAGICIAN!



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HEY, PENNY! YOU'RE MORE CHEERFUL THAN USUAL TODAY! COME ON... WHAT'S HIS NAME?

IS IT THAT OBVIOUS? *LAUGH* HIS NAME'S DANNY PRICE, AND HE'S REALLY SWEET...



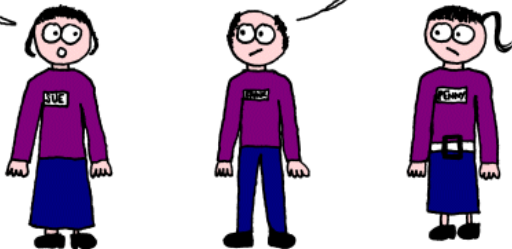
GASP YOU'RE NOT GOING TO MARRY HIM, ARE YOU?

(SUE! WE'VE ONLY JUST MET! ANYWAY, WHAT'S WRONG?

THE NAME! THE NAME!

HUH? PENNY AND DANNY? THAT'S KINDA CUTE...

NO... IF SHE MARRIES HIM, SHE'D BE PENNY CASH-PRICE!

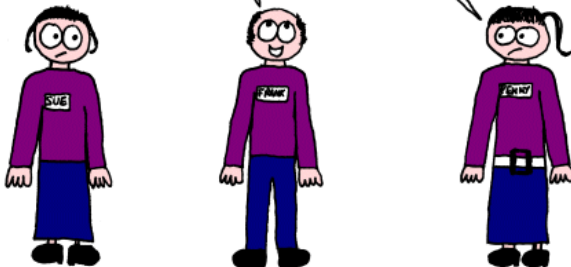


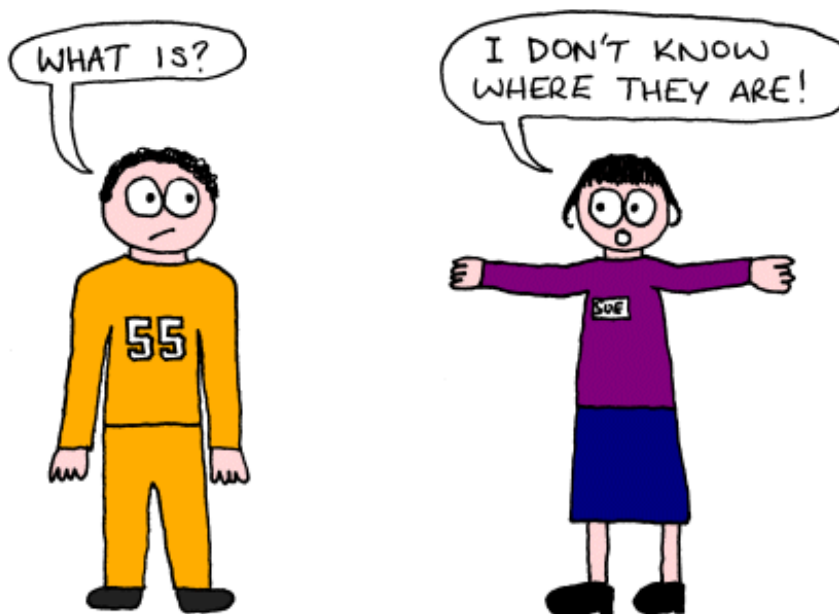
OH MY GOSH... THAT'S HILARIOUS!

GLAD YOU THINK IT'S SO FUNNY... ANYWAY, CAN I AT LEAST DATE HIM FOR A WHILE BEFORE WORRYING ABOUT THAT?

YOU'LL NEVER GET IT OUT OF YOUR HEAD...

SHUT UP, FRANK.





Credit goes to "T-Bone" for submitting this idea!

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That's your lot!

If you got to this page, and actually looked at every strip, hopefully there was something worth looking at! Thanks for sticking with it...

If you *enjoyed* what you saw, thank you - and remember that you can carry on reading the strips at the [Paper or Plastic?](#) website. And please, tell your friends! Ah, what the heck - if you didn't like it, tell your worst enemies, or something...

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